

United States Senate

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August 24, 2009

COMMITTEES:  
JUDICIARY  
APPROPRIATIONS  
ENVIRONMENT AND  
PUBLIC WORKS  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
AGING

The Honorable Daniel Akaka  
Chairman Senate Veterans Affairs Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Akaka,

The August 18, 2009 edition of the *Wall Street Journal* had an article by Mr. Jim Towey, President of Saint Vincent's College and formerly Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, concerning the Veteran Affairs Department National Center for Ethics and Health Care concerning a 52-page end-of-life planning document (Copy enclosed). This document and subject were discussed extensively on *Fox News Sunday* on August 23<sup>rd</sup>.

There is an issue as to whether the VA document inappropriately pressures disabled veterans who forgo critical care by subtly urging them on end-of-life decisions.

Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs Tammy Duckworth raised a question as to whether VA currently has this document on its website. Assistant Secretary Duckworth stated that the document is being reevaluated.

I believe it would be helpful for our Senate Veterans Affairs Committee to hold a hearing on this document and the issues raised therein to determine what range of counseling is appropriate for the Veterans Administration on this issue.

If the document is still on the VA website and a part of VA's counseling, then consideration should be given to suspending it temporarily until a determination is made as to its appropriateness.

I'm sending a copy of this letter to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki of Veterans Affairs, and Assistant Secretary Duckworth for their consideration as to possible suspension.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this request to hold a hearing.

Sincerely,



Arlen Specter

AS/bb  
Hand deliver

Cc: The Honorable Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki  
The Honorable Assistant Secretary Tammy Duckworth